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Vertical Transmission



Keryn Christiansen

President ASM

Having just returned from the Adelaide Australian Society for Microbiology (ASM) Annual Scientific Meeting I am full of enthusiasm for the future of the ASM. This was a very well attended meeting, with a program that served the diversity of our society well. The theme, 'Fermenting New Ideas', was extremely apt. New ideas were expounded by the invited international speakers, the national speakers, proffered paper presenters and by the delegates themselves. The meeting certainly conveyed the sense of fermentation in the best possible way. I have nothing but accolades for the local organising committee (LOC) and the National Scientific Advisory Committee. The LOC was obviously a very committed, enthusiastic, hardworking and fun loving group. These attributes really showed in the meeting itself. There was a certain buzz that can only be the result of the extraordinary effort made by the LOC.

The Rubbo Oration was an outstanding success. Prof Robin Weiss, a renowned expert on retroviruses, gave a talk titled 'Viruses as Parasites'. The presentation started on the role of a herpes virus in Kaposi's sarcoma but rapidly became an intriguing investigative tale on the cause and origin of canine transmissible venereal tumour. Prof Weiss held the audience spellbound as he detailed the science and trail of evidence going back to ancient wolves. His presentation style was immediately accessible to all, with a wonderful sense of humour. This was a worthy celebration of science and oration in the name Sydney Rubbo, one of the society's founding fathers.

Similarly the Bazeley Oration by Dr Gary Nabel, and the Snowden lecture by Dr Bernard Vallat were well received. The Fenner lecture was delivered by Andrew Holmes, the winner of the 2006 Fenner award that acknowledges the achievements of a scientist in the formative years of their career. His talk 'Exploration of the Bacterial Evolutionary Toolbox – Insights and Applications' was followed by the presentation of the award plaque. It was wonderful that Frank Fenner, who attended the entire meeting, presented the plaque.

Microbiology is in safe hands for the future – as demonstrated by the ASM BD student award presentations; they were interesting, showed much expertise and, most importantly, demonstrated the enthusiasm for science of the awardees.

The rest of the program was both interesting and informative. My congratulations go to Andrew Lawrence the chair of the Adelaide LOC, Andrew Butcher the chair of the Scientific Program Committee, Rachael Pratt the Social Program Coordinator, and every member of 'Team Adelaide'. Well done all!

The Melbourne LOC, chaired by Sue Cornish, was active in the promotion of the next annual scientific meeting. Chair of the Scientific Program Committee, Danilla Grando, is well advanced in the formulation of the program and I urge all members to visit the ASM website regularly for updates as they are posted. I look forward to the next meeting

and to renewing the many friendships I have made over the last year.

At the Annual General Meeting, the new president-elect Hatch Stokes was welcomed and we said farewell to the retiring past president Julian Rood. Hatch is well known to the ASM membership, having been the vice-president of scientific affairs and chair of NSAC, and it will be a pleasure to work with him over the next year during the restructure of the national office and on introducing new initiatives to the society. The major contribution made to the society by Julian over many years, and particularly more recently as president, was acknowledged with the presentation of a Distinguished Service Award.

Nominations to fill the vacant positions of Vice-President Scientific Affairs and Chair of NSAC have closed and the membership will be informed in due course as to the successful applicant.

I have recently signed an agreement with the American Society for Microbiology for an exchange scientific scholarship, negotiated by Julian Rood. This scholarship will provide for attendance at the American annual scientific meeting and support for a visit to a relevant laboratory. This exciting new initiative will be advertised in *Microbiology Australia* soon.

As alluded to previously, the council has agreed to plans for a restructure of the ASM national office. For some time I have been

aware of difficulties in expanding the role of the ASM in fulfilling our advocacy role and in giving full attention to the numerous requests for review of policy or recommendations by outside agencies. For all of these issues a full consultative process with our relevant membership is required. All members of the council are voluntary and have full-time occupations and it is difficult to give full and timely consideration to these matters.

Recently the general manager of the national office resigned and this has facilitated a wider restructure for the betterment of the society and the functioning of the council and other committees. The time has now come to have a microbiologist within the national office. I see this new position as an exciting career move for an enthusiastic, committed microbiologist who would like to be involved at all levels of the society and interact with many outside scientific and government agencies. The position will be advertised in the next few months and I urge anyone interested to contact me to discuss further. I will keep the membership informed of the progress of this position.

Once again I thank the Adelaide LOC for providing our members with a wonderful annual scientific meeting. I thank Janette Sofronidis from the national office for her thorough and dedicated performance as conference manager, Meg, Lina, Ellen and Michelle for their support and the Melbourne LOC for what I am sure will be an exciting meeting in Melbourne next year.

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